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SUBJECT: KING NEITHER ACCEPTS NOR DECLINES INVITATION TO
DAMASCUS SUMMIT; OPEN TO CREATIVE DEPLOYMENT TO UNIFIL

REF: STATE 12556

Classified By: Ambassador David Hale, Reasons 1.4 (B) & (D)

¶1. (S) On February 10, shortly after the departure from his office of visiting Syrian Foreign Minister Walid al-Muallem, the King briefed the Ambassador alone on the discussion. The purpose of the visit was to extend formally an invitation to the King to attend a March Arab League summit in Damascus. The King said he told Muallem that with all due respect to Syria, he had always made clear to Bashar al-Asad that his decision to attend was going to be a collective one with Egypt and Saudi Arabia, and would be contingent on positive shifts in Syrian policy on a number of key issues. While there had been some progress on countering AQI in Syria, the King said, there had been no evidence of a productive policy shift toward the presidential crisis in Lebanon or toward support for Hamas. On the contrary, Moussa had just left Beirut empty handed and the Jordanians had evidence that Khaled Mishaal personally ordered, from Damascus, that Hamas seize a Jordanian relief convoy sent to Gaza. He would consult the others, he added, but did not see much reason to expect key heads of state to attend, he said he told Muallem. He further told Muallem, he said, that the Syrians were missing a "golden opportunity" to give the King something constructive to point to regarding Syrian strategy during Abdullah's March trip to the U.S. Comment: Bassem Awadallah later said the Jordanian press release on the Muallem meeting would specifically not confirm attendance at the summit. Instead, it would "confirm Jordan's keenness to participate in a summit to promote Arab solidarity." Awadallah emphasized we should not misread this statement as a positive signal. End Comment.

¶2. (S/NF) Ambassador asked the King if he would consider a troop deployment to replace the Qataris in UNIFIL (reftel), noting this was something PM Siniora personally would welcome. The King said he would like to respond positively, but his answer would depend on the role envisioned. He did not want troops on the ground to become a target, but perhaps a logistics support, command and control, or humanitarian role (such as a hospital deployment) could be developed. He said he would give it further thought and get back to us. (Note: Until he does so, his receptivity to possible deployment should only be discussed within the USG. End note.)

¶3. (S) Comment: Royal Court Chief Awadallah had told visiting A/S Welch and Ambassador on February 6 that the Syrians had asked him to visit Damascus in the coming days. According to the King, the Syrians subsequently asked that Awadallah postpone his travel until Muallem visited Amman. In the absence of anything new from the Syrians, the King said he saw no point to dispatching Awadallah to Syria. The Jordanians share the view that summit attendance/success is proving not to carry the weight with Asad they had initially

thought, and is not producing the needed pressure for behavioral change in Syria.
HALE